

“Process Improvement doesn’t work!”

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“Process Improvement doesn’t work!” the manager grumbled. “We tried that—it didn’t do us any good!”

And yet some organizations have used systematic process improvement to achieve great gains in longer-term results.

Why do some companies realize significant benefits while others feel that they have wasted their time? One of the keys is the need to recognize and overcome the specific obstacles that are unique to each organization’s working environment. Some of these obstacles to improvement are outlined below.

Obstacles to Improvement

1. Lack of active ownership and leadership by top management
2. Inadequate training, coaching, and mentoring
3. Denial or failure to recognize the problems
4. Procrastination before starting
5. Skepticism or pessimism that things can improve
6. Existing internal animosities and conflicts
7. A working environment that is noticeably lacking in trust, mutual respect, enthusiasm, esprit de corps, and camaraderie
8. An ambiguous or impractical strategy and process for improvement
9. Lack of clear goals, plans and metrics
10. Attempting changes that are inconsistent with the character and core values of the organization
11. Narrow participation—failure to involve all the key stakeholders
12. Poor monitoring and problem solving
13. Working on symptoms instead of root causes, and failure to concentrate on real constraints
14. Taking on too much and unjustified optimism—not enough time, people, resources, or money to achieve the goals
15. Too many shortcuts—trying to improve faster and cheaper than anyone ever did before
16. Poor communications, and lack of buy in, alignment, and commitment across the organization
17. Proliferation of unproductive “improvement” activities
18. Dubious claims of success—checking off the boxes
19. Premature declaration of victory
20. Mismatch between results and rewards
21. Failure to follow through, lack of persistence

Some attempts at improvement fix one problem but worsen another—for example, costs improve at the expense of quality and customer satisfaction. Well-executed, systematic process improvement offers a means to *simultaneously* improve costs, schedule, *and* quality. With serious attention to *all* of the above obstacles that pertain, any organization can greatly improve overall operations and longer-term results.

What does process improvement look like when it *does* work? See the following pages.

Successful Process Improvement

Hmm. That's a long list of obstacles on the previous page. What does process improvement look like when it *does* work? Well, there are a variety of successful approaches, but they all usually include many of the same basic components. And they all have the same goal—significant, long-term improvements in overall operations.

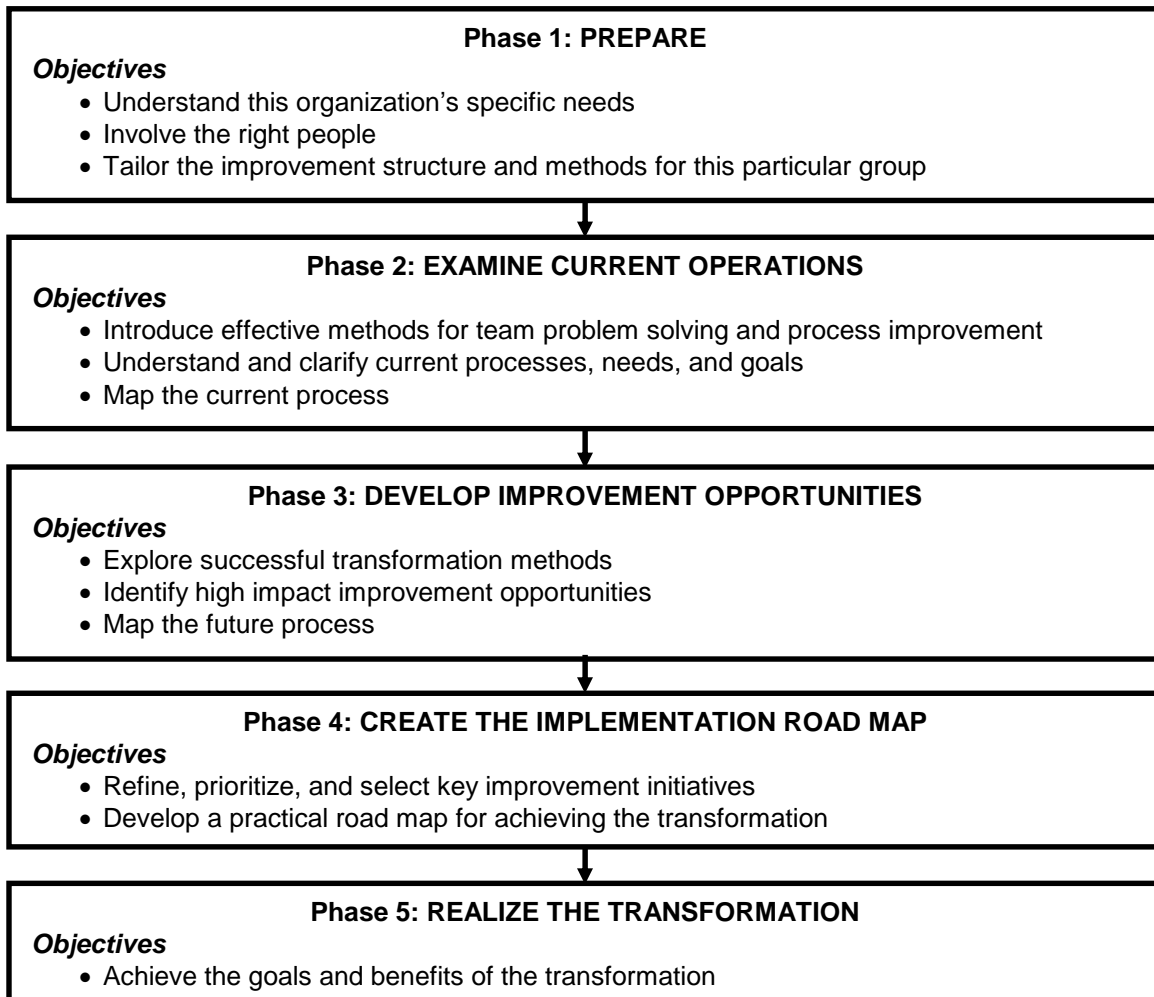
What is process improvement?

Process improvement (or process development) involves the examination and improvement of how work and information flows throughout an organization, and how goals get accomplished. It includes measuring and acting on the effectivity of all aspects of the entire operation, in order to remain competitive and survive. Related methods include continuous process improvement, process redesign, process reengineering, TQM, lean enterprise, Baldrige National Quality Program, Six Sigma, CMMI, Balanced Scorecard, and other comprehensive techniques.

How do we improve?

Process improvement is achieved by devoting time and resources to it, in an organized manner. Improvements are gained by increasing teamwork, enhancing communications, systematic problem solving, process mapping, tracking results and resolving anomalies, and other techniques for assessing and reinventing the organization's operating procedures, technologies, attitudes, and culture.

Example of a successful process improvement format



Rapid Transformation Process (RTP)

The Rapid Transformation Process (RTP) provides a fast, economical way to stimulate improvement activities and move forward with action plans. This approach has been shown to increase teamwork, improve communications, and energize people to get "out of the box" and reach for a stronger future.

Phase 1: Prepare

- A. Strategic formation with the Sponsor
- B. Operations review
- C. Team formation (Executive Council and Implementation Team) and interviews; pre-positioning

Phase 2: Examine Current Operations – Improvement Team Session 1

- A. Teamwork and communications
- B. Stakeholders needs and organizational goals
- C. Process mapping—typical current operations, as a total system

Phase 3: Develop Improvement Opportunities – Improvement Team Session 2

- A. How to economically achieve fast, high quality decisions and results
- B. Brainstorming and innovation of improvement opportunities
- C. Process mapping—potential future operations, as a total system

Phase 4: Create The Implementation Road Map – Improvement Team Session 3

- A. Transformation strategies and process refinements
- B. Implementation master plan—the road map
- C. Recommendations and next steps

RTP Benefits

- Understand the key survival issues for the organization
- Explore proven approaches for building a successful future
- Increase buy-in and alignment on shared goals
- Increase teamwork and effective communications
- Identify some of today's most persistent problems
- Tap into the brainstorming power of the organization
- Innovate and collaborate on potential solutions
- Increase pride in our organization
- Increase appreciation for our colleagues
- Stimulate the future leadership of the company
- Get "out of the box" and reach for a stronger future

Implementation

The RTP leads to Phase 5, the implementation of the transformation based on total system analysis, cost-benefit trade-offs, and explicit plans with measurable goals and well-defined responsibilities.

Phase 5: Realize The Transformation

- A. Commission and coach the Implementation Teams
- B. Monitor results and take corrective actions
- C. Embed the new processes into normal operations
- D. Adopt a philosophy of continuous improvement

Critical success factors

All organizations are burdened with a constant stream of immediate and high priority tasks. The fundamentals outlined above are necessary, but two critical success factors are particularly essential to overcome the blizzard of pressing responsibilities and achieve significant improvements.

The first factor: the person or group that signs the checks has to really care about achieving process improvement and take an active leadership role in making it happen. The second: take advantage of expert coaching to help guide and facilitate the transition with effective methodologies.

But if those factors aren't in place, don't worry too much. Just check off the boxes, write the report, put it away, and get back to what you were doing before. The organization that will put you out of business will take care of the rest.

POMONIK CONSULTING, INC.

"CHAOS REMOVAL SERVICES"SM

George M. Pomonik

Mr. Pomonik has extensive experience in business consulting, management, marketing, and engineering. His background includes roles as VP of Engineering, VP of R&D, and Program Manager. He is a veteran in solving diverse and difficult challenges, and has worked on systems that have successfully operated in a range of arenas from the moon (Surveyor lunar lander) to the bottom of the ocean (Hughes Glomar Explorer).

Since 1983, Mr. Pomonik has been providing consulting services in management, team building, technology, and marketing. He helps organizations increase their competitiveness, teamwork, profitability, productivity, and survivability. Benefits to clients include improvements in products, services, time-to-market, strategic planning, process definition, and the speed and quality of decisions and results.

His technical experience includes systems engineering, instrumentation and test, ocean engineering, offshore petroleum technology, missiles, spacecraft, structural dynamics, proposals and cost estimates, and the design, development and evaluation of new products. Mr. Pomonik has five patents related to this work. He has a degree in Mechanical Engineering, as well as postgraduate training in management, systems engineering, marketing, finance, and communications.

Mr. Pomonik's capabilities and experience include business process improvement, covering the examination and improvement of how work and information flows throughout a company, and how closure is accomplished.

He works with his clients to "remove chaos" and increase their focus on defining and achieving key goals. Support is tailored to the organization's needs, from assessment of the situation through hands-on implementation of change. Examples of some successful assignments:

- Organized and facilitated process improvement and team building sessions for a unit of a major crime lab, as part of a rapid renewal program. Resulted in a practical road map for achieving significant operating improvements while balancing quality, speed, and economy.
- Reduced new product release time from 18-24 months to less than 10 months. Also implemented effective teamwork, process mapping, and other techniques that resulted in permanent improvements in workflow, communications, and meetings.
- Resolved ambiguities in manufacturing and production test specifications, suggested modifications to meet the same needs at lower costs, and supported the implementation of the changes. Program saved over \$8 million.
- Helped a small start-up company define their workflow, structure, and individual roles and responsibilities. Improved internal communications and increased the speed of task completion.
- Supported a billion-dollar aerospace program, including integration with the procedures of a new parent company, best practices assessment, cycle time improvement efforts, improvements in communications, teamwork and alignment, and other means for achieving fast, high quality decisions and results.

For more information see www.pomonik.com